When

Wm. Avery Stratton

Owned The

Mississippi River

1871

U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

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"Post Light of the Mississippi"

(See Page 17)

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CHAPTER I

Adventures on the Mississippi

It was in November 1880, when I made my second venture to Mississippi where two brothers of my step-mother were living since before the Civil War —one, William Robinson doing business in Jackson, the other, Charles, at Bolton, Hinds County, the latter with stores there and at Bennett's Landing, now called Robinsville, Tunica County.

Bolton is on the main line railroad, west between Jackson and Vicksburg, about 20 miles from Jackson.

My first venture was in April 1871, during the period of Carpet-bag and Ku Klux Klan rule. On this first trip going via New York to Charleston by steamer, then by rail to Augusta, Atlanta and Montgomery, stopping off at Montgomery to see a school mate, Phillip Cook, formerly of Oxford. He, having charge of the Western Union Tele-

graph office at that point, and one of the few sound operators in those days. I learned through him that some bridges had been swept away by recent floods, that I would have to change my course via Selma and Meridian and go via Mobile, and New Orleans.

So I started on my journey to Bolton by way of Mobile, New Orleans and Jackson from Montgomery, Alabama.

The track was under water nearly all the way from New Orleans to Jackson which you will see by looking on a map is a long stretch over 183 miles; consequently the train made very slow progress and in many places, and often in a wilderness it was necessary for a hand-car to push ahead removing floating logs and debris to clear the track. Thus we were in constant fear of being stopped at any moment for "good" and the fires of the engine put out by the high water.

I finally reached Jackson and while waiting for the Vicksburg train thought I would visit the Capitol which was not far distant. The nearest ap-

proach was through a basement entrance. The weather being quite warm late in April in this latitude I was wearing a yellow linen "duster' which was quite fashionable and common at that time and suitable for such a trip anywhere and even now in summer time.

As I entered the Capitol a colored man was standing in the wide open doorway. In replying to my inquiry for direction and further information such as a stranger might desire, he replied:-

"You're from the No'th?"

I replied, "yes."

"You won't meet with a very wo'm reception down heah."

I replied that I had an uncle that I had come to see. He inquired his name. I replied William Robinson.

He says "Mr. Robinson, I know him very well. My name is James Lynch, I am secretary of State, I'll show you around heah." Of course I accepted his offer and he took me to both the Senate and Assembly Chambers, and introduced me to members, the names

of which I have long since forgotten, part of them were colored and part of them white, then called Carpet-Baggers. One colored member said, "I am one of the men you heard about that was in the riot at Meridian." As near as I can remember this was a fight between Ku Klux Klan and Carpet Baggers and some were killed.

There was great confusion in both branches of the Legislature. I cannot remember now what the discussions were all about. In the library were books and documents scattered in all directions. On the floor I picked up a book partly open with the face down, cover up.

Why I should happen to pick this up is the most mysterious of any thing that ever happened in my career and what I happened to find in the open page will be referred to at the conclusion of the story of my second venture, if not too long. (See page 32, chapter 2) Suffice to say that I left Mississippi July 1, 1871 as a result of this discovery arrived in Washington July 3 for the first

time passed a Civil Service Examination, Monday, July 6 and was on the payroll of the Treasury Dept. July 8, 1871. The book referred to was the U. S. Statutes and the open page gave the salaries of officers and clerks in the U. S. Civil Service.

I left Washington, D. C. in 1877 and went to Oregon and Washington (Territories then) just in time to find General Howard fighting the Indians, Nez Perces. I retreated from that venture back to California just in time to hear Dennis Kearny deliver his Sunday Sermons on the "Sand Lot." "The Chinese must go." Thence back to New York city with Lord & Taylor until November 1880. Leaving there as before stated (Nov. 1880) after the yellow fever epidemic was over in the south and the quarantine lifted and Memphis depopulated about one-third as near as I can remember. See Binghamton Press of Aug. 5, 1930, laying of corner stone for new Post Office. "News from Memphis yellow fever plague of 1879.")

The weather up to this time (Nov.

1880) had been quite favorable in the south and a large cotton crop anticipated and with General Hancock democrat running against General Garfield for President the southern states felt sure of victory and great prosperity.

So I was called back unexpectedly in a hurry the second time by my uncles and went direct to Jackson by rail thence to Bolton.

But alas: Hancock was defeated and it began to rain and rain leaving the cotton crop only about half gathered and what was left of very poor quality and worthless.

* * * *

It was on February 16, 1881 that I was directed to go to their plantations in Tunica county (5 sections of 640 acres each, near the river) and check the emigration and abandonment from their plantations there caused by the incessant rains all through the fall and winter, thereby making it impossible for the negroes to gather the cotton crop leaving them destitute and discouraged.

This plantation was situated near Bennetts landing, now called Robinsonville, and could only be reached by steamboat then. The James Lee leaving Memphis, Tennessee twice or three times each week plying between there and "Friars Point" and Helena, Ark. The Yazoo and Mississippi Valley Railroad was not yet built at this time.

I started a Thursday night by rail from Jackson to Memphis, reaching there in the morning following. The steamer, James Lee, due to leave Memphis on Friday 17th for Helena and other points south had not arrived on account of the weather and high water and no one could guess when it would arrive and the officers and managers of the steamship company could not promise to give me a landing even if they did make the return trip to reach my destination.

As I had started from Bolton the Sunday previous and met with unexpected delay I determined not to wait any longer; that it was important that

I should reach my destination at the earliest possible moment.

First, I learned the distance from Memphis to my destination was about 35 miles, that the river flowed at the rate of about four miles per hour and that if I could procure a boat of some kind and get away by 11 o'clock I should reach my objective before dark the same day.

The sun shone brightly, the weather calm and mild and the river did not appear very wide at Memphis compared to what I discovered afterwards at other points. Although nearly up to extreme high water mark, and the current running apparently smooth and of uniform velocity, I inquired of some boys if they knew where I could procure a boat suitable for the trip. They replied that if I could wait long enough for them to cross the river to the opposite side they thought they could find one good enough for me to float down with the current.

I directed them to go ahead as fast as possible. So they started across to the

Arkansas side and returned after some time with an old apparently abandoned bateau fitted up with two wooden oar-pins on each side for oar locks with oars to match, and they demanded $2.25 for the entire outfit which I thought was a bargain, as it did not leak of any consequence. This type of boat was 12 ft. long, 4 ft. wide, and 2 ft. deep, straight sides made out of two inch planks square at each end with flat bottom and ends of one inch boards and nailed with seat in the middle. Each oarlock consisted of two wooden pegs driven into the rail of the boat.

There were many people gathered along the bluff on the Memphis side as I started off about 11 o'clock, whether from curiosity in looking at the high water or to see me off I never knew, not thinking it of much event at the time.

As I had rowed on the Potomac at Washington for pleasure and exercise many times and for several years with a St. Lawrence river boat with swivel, oars, it did not seem much of an event or undertaking with good weather

since I expected to float mostly with the current and use the oars principally for guiding and it would be quite a pleasure as well as a business trip or undertaking, on such an apparent pleasant day; thus you have the preliminaries.

Now we will start off with the thrilling part of the story:-

While the river at Memphis is made up principally from the far north with such tributaries, as the Missouri to the Rocky mountains, the Ohio and Alleghany on the east I was surprised not to see any floating ice at this time of year as far north as Memphis (lat. 35) which you would most likely find a little further up during a "freshet." So I had nothing to fear from "ice jams."

I started along all right according to calculations and anticipation on schedule time, until about midafternoon when the river seemed to widen and the western or Arkansas shore scarcely visible and I began to wonder in what direction I was moving 'till I discovered from the increasing quantity of flood wood, floating stumps, fences and drift

wood of all descriptions that I was simply going round and round and nearing to the center and diameter of a great whirlpool. By referring to a map you will see that a few miles below Memphis there is a large sized island which separates the river into two main channels and as they join below in high water this immense whirlpool is formed. Although a penitentiary was situated upon this island I never discovered or heard of it until told about it later.

On account of the great distance across perhaps two or three miles, I realized the importance of keeping close to the Mississippi side in order to avoid being carried too far down the river in case I should reach my objective on the opposite or Arkansas side. So late in the afternoon as the weather and wind began to change with sign of an approaching storm, I could see the importance of saving my strength for any such emergency.

It required hard pulling for quite a time to get out of this whirlpool and get

my bearing again and to be sure that I was actually moving down stream on account of the many floating whirlpools, large and small.

In this first permanent whirlpool among the flood trash was part of a rail fence with posts tied together with a small rope, as there was no rope or chain attached to the boat I saw the importance of grabbing for this rope that it would come handy later in which you will see it did.

As I had heard nothing about high water before I left Jackson and nothing unusual for the boats to be delayed at Memphis, I thought nothing of any danger and did not realize the situation and conditions 'till deep into it, but the character and appearance of drift wood and trash of all description and finding of this piece of rope caused me to pause and consider, stop and think and determine and decide and prepare for action and unforseen thrilling experience.

My baggage consisted of a valise and umbrella, as the valise contained valu-

able papers and unsigned contracts prepared and ready to be signed by the tenants which was the principal object of the expedition. I decided that in the event of "shipwreck" before it was too late that it would be wise to attach and fasten the rope to the boat, myself and valise all together. That if in case of "shipwreck" if ever discovered I could more easily be identified.

Up to this time I had not made much progress in covering the journey as anticipated; probably not far from the boundary line between Mississippi and Tennessee and it was then getting near night fall, when suddenly the clouds began to darken, the wind began to blow and the rain to pour, and waves to roar. Not a boat of any description had I seen during the day. So it was quite easy to understand that I had the river all to myself no matter where or at what place.

It is well known that the river is constantly changing its course. The banks caving in on both sides with trees falling in time of high water, and even the

levee protecting the valley in the state of Mississippi and La. often washing away and resisting all human efforts.

Also that below the junction of the Ohio and Arkansas, it flows more irregularly in Zig Zag shape curving snake like in the form of a horse shoe or letter "S." Sometimes N. E. & N. W. then south east and south west instead of directly south or straight. My first thought was that I must keep close to the Mississippi shore in order to be able to land even if I ever reached my objective.

To reach the objective landing on the Mississippi side opposite on the Arkansas side would take me several miles down before I could reach the Mississippi shore so I saved all my strength in pulling against the wind from the Mississippi side as near as possible.

With the wind blowing and waves slashing against the constantly caving banks, trees and all, there was no alternative but to go ahead with the current—undertake to land in such a storm was impossible with a 12 foot

boat of the "bateau" type even in the day time.

There was no light to be seen from either shore, not a steamboat had passed in either direction all that day. The only living things to be seen or heard was occasional flocks of wild geese and ducks flying high.

As before stated it was necessary to keep near the Eastern or Mississippi side of the river with the wind blowing in varying directions by reason of the various directions of the river itself, including whirlpools and on account of the total darkness. Thus: I was simply pulling and going practically "blindfold" and drifted in that manner sometimes passing through rushing channels and around or through imagined or real islands with trees and limbs scraping the side and overhead expecting every moment to capsize or wrecked. From this experience and happening, before landing the same night, I must have made up for lost time in circling around in the permanent whirlpool and traveled much faster than 4

miles per hour. It is hard to remember and describe the detail of a venture or expedition of this kind so many years ago (50 years).

But I can simply say that were it not for by experience with swivel oars and oar locks on the Potomac I never could have survived such a trip in storm and darkness and land to tell this story. About this time of night (past 10 o'clock) the wind began to calm down and rain slacken up and in the far distance for the first time I could see a bright light on the Mississippi or eastern side which would disappear and then reappear, accordingly as I rounded the uneven and circular course of the river leaving me in doubt as to whether it was the same light or a different one as it reappeared.

However, I assumed it was most likely a habitation and therefore made my calculations and changed my course pulling directly for this light as my only hope of a possible landing. As the minutes flew by it seemed brighter and brighter and in more constant view and

permanency, although apparently far away. I continued pulling and steering for this objective as my only possible salvation. As I approached the dangerous shore at this point the wind and rain had slackened sufficiently so that I could see to my surprise that it was not only a newly and unheard of "Post Light" of the Mississippi river and "Beacon of the Sea" under direction of the "Commissioner of Light House" but placed in such a manner back from the shore as to reveal the best condition of the river and shore at this point for a safe landing.

This "Post Light" was placed 25 to 50 ft. from the shore on level ground 12 ft. to 15 ft. high reached by a ladder, in a large lamp and locked, surrounded by a wilderness as near as I can remember with the trees cut away in front to the waters edge, and few rods on each side. (See National Geographic Magazine January 1913, page 26) and also inside cover page.

Also so situated as to be discernable for a long distance from the river in

any direction and more important still in the fact on its being placed at a point on the river at this place covering a small cove like shape of the river and rather smooth action of the water: thereby suitable for a rare and safe landing—so at last this was my only and first opportunity to land.

Now at this place the river was within 3 or 4 ft. of the level land with the levee not more than 20 rods away and with the timber cut away, a tree 8 or 12 in. diameter had been left in front with the butt-end projecting over the bank far enough as to be liable to fall with the bank at any moment.

On account of the constant caving in of the river banks as before mentioned I decided it would be the safest method to take the chance of climbing out on the fallen tree than to land direct. So I rowed under the fallen tree and threw and fastened the lucky rope previously referred to over and around the tree. Then threw my overcoat, valise and umbrella and oars out on the bank and then took the precarious but only

chance and leaped out on to the tree.

Thus I was now on land but where? Leaving the boat anchored to the fallen tree I surveyed the light and surroundings. It was now about midnight and still raining some—with no sign of any habitation thought I would build a fire from loose limbs and fallen timbers and perhaps some one would come to my rescue. I had no matches and the lamp was locked so that I dare not meddle with that.

I had never seen but knew the levee was back from the river and that there might be some habitation nearby on account of the Post Light and keeper. So I started out for the levee and in the darkness found it as expected not far away—with no trees over head and free from any roughness or deepness of mud and quite a smooth path I started southward on the levee.

Tramping along through the mud and rain with light shoes and no rubbers about a mile in the darkness I came upon a house near the river with lights still burning. Looking through

the window I could see a woman sitting apparently at needle work. So I had the courage to knock at the door, she appeared and opened the door a few inches and I told her that I was lost on the river and could she give me a few matches that I could start a fire to keep warm 'till day light. She gave me a few matches, not more than half a dozen, with the remark that she would give me more if she had them to spare: that the place was Star Landing, DeSota County, Miss., only a few miles distant to my destination in Tunica County.

I was surprised to learn that I had covered over half the entire distance contemplated and so traveled back on the levee and found a hollow fallen tree full of dry leaves, I suppose carried in by squirrels or other wild animals—so I got a fire started, but with more smoke than fire. No one came to my rescue and being nearly exhausted from the almost constant rowing the entire distance, with nothing to eat or drink.

I took the two oars, placed them up against the big hollow tree in a slant-

ing position and with a good heavy overcoat which I happened to have and the umbrella over my head, laid down for the night, on, and between the two oars.

A little later I saw the light of a steamer going up the river which I suppose must have been the James Lee due to leave Memphis Friday morning, going south and which I was supposed to take. This was the only boat of any description that I saw during the entire trip of two days.

Toward morning the rain ceased entirely and the wind calmed down so that at day break I was undecided what course to pursue. After so long a period (50 years) I cannot recall whether the "Post Light" had been extinguished but as no one appeared and being far away from any probable habitation —I concluded to take the chance of attempting to undertake the objective, either Polk's or Bennett's Landing, the nearest point to the Plantation Store not more than 10 or 15 miles farther down.

I should remark that the boat was anchored not more than 20 rods from my resting place and in the morning I was not surprised when I discovered that the bank had caved away during the night and the butt-end of the tree had fallen upon the boat, breaking one of the wooden pins of the left oar lock, together with part of the bank tumbling into the boat. Here was another problem, not only of what to do if I started out again, but how to undertake the chance of ever getting into the "darned thing" again with the bank just as treacherous as when I landed.

I finally concluded that the only alternation was to take another chance and attempt to get into the boat once more and go on again, as previously remarked it is hard to recall and remember details after so many years have passed, but I remember well of creeping out on the fallen tree after first throwing my valise and leaping back into the boat again, but how I ever got the dirt, mud and water out, has passed

my memory, only it must have been accomplished by use of the oars, as I had nothing else to do it with.

As before stated the weather having calmed down I had more courage after such a storm to go on even with a broken oar lock—and the belief that I could not expect anything more thrilling than what I had already experienced and so I pulled out again early in the morning calculating that I could easily reach my destination before night fall.

In place of wind and rain there was a dense fog which I presumed would disappear and lift by an expected breeze at this time of year. In this expectation I was disappointed and soon discovered by the quantity of drift wood, stumps, etc., that I was not moving at all. I stuck one of the oars down and touched bottom at about 4 to 6 ft. and soon discovered that all was stationary that I was covering a bar in the river and that the "Post Light" referred to was stationed at this point principally as a signal and guide for boats against being caught on this bar.

Soon the fog lifted and I decided it would be necessary to pull for the Arkansas side and reach the far away current there that would carry me on down the river to my objective.

After reaching the current near the Arkansas side the wind and breeze began to blow up from the Mississippi side and it was necessary all the way to keep well to the Mississippi side to be able to land with this type of boat when reaching my destination. In case I should reach my objective at a point opposite on the Arkansas side even in calm weather with no wind it would have necessitated landing several miles below with the current running at the average speed.

So it did not require much foresight for any one with any kind of a boat and a knowledge of the average width of this great river or moving ocean to realize the importance of keeping close to the side you expect to land.

As the river winds and turns in horse shoe shape, sometimes N. E. or N. W., S. E. or S. W., it is difficult to determine

from the river itself in which direction you are actually going but in this case and location I was obliged to pull with all my strength from about mid-day to keep near the eastern or Mississippi side and to be able to land.

About mid-afternoon I discovered Polks or Bennett Landing, my destination, but on account of the wind and rowing against both wind and current did not land until about twilight, sometimes losing more than I could gain.

Thus, for two days I had this great navigable river all to myself without seeing a single boat of any description moving in any direction, except the "James Lee," making the return trip as described.

One of the strangest incidents connected with this venture is how I managed to get any where at all with only one oar lock—I must have fastened one oar to the broken oar lock with a piece of the rope which I happened to find in the floating flood wood before mentioned, by tieing it to the remainder pin which comprises one of the pairs on

each side as described in the beginning, I know of no other method by which I could have possibly performed such a feat; also how I could have survived the endurance and constant strain without a morsel of food during the entire voyage. And to be brief I must say that were it not for the unheard of "Post Light" it is doubtful if I could have ever lived to tell this story.

From the effects of high and low water, or floods and drought many bars are formed from which islands are created that appear and disappear according to the condition of the river, and this condition is one reason that necessitates the maintenance and establishment of the numerous "Post Lights for guiding steamers and boats against hidden bars and islands.

While the Mississippi proper rises in Itaska Lake, Minnesota, a distance of 2,555 miles from there to the Gulf of Mexico, its mouth. Its true source is the Missouri, its main Western tributary.

The fountain head of the Missouri is

in the Rocky and Bitter Root Mountains, Lat. 113, with such tributaries as Red Rock Creek, its upper course; the Beaver Head, its middle course; and the Jefferson Fork, the lower course. It rises on the boundary between Montana and Idaho, 20 miles West of the western boundary of the Yellowstone National Park, and from this source to the Gulf it is 4,221 miles, the longest river in the world. The Missouri is navigable from its juncture with the Mississippi, 20 miles above St. Louis, to Fort Benton, Montana, within 40 miles of Great Falls, a distance of 2,285 miles.

Its other main tributaries are the Milk(crossing the boundary line, Lat. 49, into Canada), the Yellowstone, Platte, Kansas, James, Big Sioux and Nibora, and the Des Moines (See Encylopedia Brittanica pages 604-605, volume 18).

While the Missouri is always brackish and muddy in color as it reaches the Mississippi, from the effect of drainage of the alkaline plains, it is not the case with the Mississippi. The water of the

Mississippi and its northern Tributaries above are clear and placid most of the time but it is yellow and riley below St. Louis and its junction with the Missouri to the Gulf all the time and so all the fish to be seen are of the "sucker" type, below St. Louis.

I should further remark: that on a previous trip down the river by steamer, the James Lee, from Memphis, for drinking water I was given the riley colored river water which was much against my desire and taste and in reply to my remark to that effect the Captain said, "It is the best drinking water in the world—many women ride on the river steamers and drink this water to conceive," but I have never given the matter any further thought or inquiry until writing this story.

Millions have been expended by the states and Government in maintaining and improving its condition, protecting and building levees, but it is the same old crooked river that it was in the beginning with its constant changing "zig-zag" course, and in no better navi-

gable condition than it was 50 years ago and with less traffic now than then.

Without the Light House Service which watches its constant changing course, periodical overflow and condition of the bars and islands, maintenance of the Post Lights with very little expense compared to that of building and maintaining levees and other improvements, there would be very little traffic as modern rail, truck and airplane services is fast, superceding any kind of water service and transportation.

In conclusion, I should mention my pet river, the "Mighty Columbia" whose placid waters with high banks and rising fertile grazing and rich wheat plains, its unbroken, never changing course, unharnessed by levees, its increasing commerce, open navigation, both winter and summer, and salmon fisheries. The power and irrigation dam near the Dallas and Cascade Mountains, forty miles from Portland, Oregon, its eastern source crossing the longitudinal line of the western source

of the Missouri in the Bitter Rock and Rocky Mountains. The waters of one emptying into the Gulf of Mexico, the other into the Pacific Ocean. Thus you see it drains and will benefit an empire as large as Germany without any cost to the states through which it passes or is bounded by.

Compare this to the Mississippi. Stop and think and then consider the results of what this region and river will be, compared to the Valley of the Mississippi. Count the cost of each.

I have written this as one of the many ventures and hair breath escapes during my life time.

While it never seemed anything out of the ordinary to me at the time and not as venturesome as some others, it has always been the outstanding and most interesting one to my many friends and others and it is at their request that I am jotting down details and make it as brief as possible for their sake and those who have never seen or heard of me before.

To any one who has navigated this

great river draining 21 degrees of latitude and 37 degrees of longitude from the Alleghany Mountains on the east to the Rocky Mountains on the west. From New Orleans (Lat. 30) and the Gulf of Mexico (Lat. 29) on the south; to Lake Superior, Itaska Lake (the source 2,555 miles) the Red river of the north. Then the main tributary Missouri, and its northern tributations, such as the Milk and Frenchman rivers leading into the Province of Saskatchewan and Alberta, Canada across and beyond the boundary line (Lat. 49) and knowing its constant changing course and the fact that fast rail, auto and air transportation is superceding any kind of water navigation and the fact that already many steamers are yearly being taken off for lack of patronage, it seems useless for the Government to attempt to harness or control or spend money for any kind of purpose (Except the Light House Service) more than the States through which it passes or is bounded by, have already done and are doing—which states cover a territory

of many square miles of the most extensive fertile and productive soil and land to be found in any part of the world.

CHAPTER II

Six Years in the Treasury Department

Referring to my first adventure to Mississippi (Chapter I) I mentioned the accidental discovery in the Capitol at Jackson of finding on the floor of the Library an open book, face down, cover up, which chanced to be the U. S. Statutes, and the open page showed the fixed salaries of all officers, clerks and employees of the Treasury Department.

As I had previously, before starting for Mississippi applied for a position in the Treasury without knowing anything whatever about salaries or duties which was not so important a matter as the job itself and prospects of promotion but from a letter I had received from Congressman Prindle of Norwich, New York about the same time before starting for Mississippi, I had no anticipation nor hopes of ever hearing anything more from Washington

and therefore I had quite forgotten and never expected to hear anything more from that source, again. It seems like a miracle that I should happen to pick up this book at this time and find such important and desired information. Thus for the first time, I learned from the U. S. Statutes that if I ever happened to get a job in Washington, the salary would be not less than $1,200 per annum to start with, while I was only receiving $600.00 per annum in Mississippi, the same as I had been getting in the Juliand Bank in Greene.

But again to my surprise and astonishment, within a few weeks after my arrival in Mississippi, I received a letter from Washington sent to my address in Greene to appear in Washington July 6th for examination for the position previously referred to in the Treasury Department.

Up to this time I had never heard of a Civil Service Examination but the salary compared to what I had been getting was too tempting for me not to take the chance and expense of a trip

to Washington for the purpose.

My uncles discouraged the idea of a Government position, one of them said he knew of an acquaintance who worked there thirty-five years and did not save up enough for burial purposes. However, they finally agreed that if I failed in the examination that they would pay my fare back to Mississippi; and right here I will say that if I had failed in getting the job that I did not have money enough left to carry me back to Mississippi.

As before stated, the examination was to be held Monday, July 6th. I arrived Friday, July 3rd; Saturday, July 4th was a holiday and all departments were closed. The first thing I did, was to purchase a dictionary and arithmetic to brush up a little on mathematics and spelling. After seeing the clerks, officers and employees coming and going out of the department, I had the utmost confidence in my ability and qualifications for almost any kind of a job there, this confidence, I suppose counted more than a college education

without experience, at least it turned out that way, for to make a long story short, I will say that I was on the payroll July 8th at a salary of $1200.00 per annum and assigned to the Office of Internal Revenue under General Pleasanton, Commissioner.

While I was thus employed in the Internal Revenue Bureau, by principal duties after the abolishment of Internal Revenue Assessors, were in examining Semi-Annual Reports of all Savings Banks, Trust Companies and private Banks in the United States, not including National Banks which passed through the Comptroller of the Currency. Such savings Bank Trust Companies and Private Bankers being required to pay a revenue tax of 1/24th of 1% per month on all average deposits exceeding $2,000.00 in the name of any one person or company, and a penalty of 10% on circulation if any. Also, a further exemption after such deductions, of the total amount invested in U. S. Government Bonds.

The tax on circulation fell heavily on

the Mining Companies in Montana, Idaho and numerous Mormon Co-Operative Associations in Utah and the remote Rocky Mountain sections which like California, Nevada, Oregon and Washington were on a gold basis, (the Resumption of Specie Payments was not until Jan 1, 1879, and no Banks of issue in the Pacific and Northwestern States and Territories. Consequently many mining companies and Mormon Associations issued a form of note payable on demand, in goods or gold which had a better circulation than the United States or National Bank Notes which were at a discount by reason of the premium on gold. The Savings Banks and Trust Companies of the Pacific Coast States and particularly in San Francisco, paid as high as 8% on deposits and on account of the higher interest rates then prevailing on the Pacific Coast, could not afford to hold Government Bonds which were selling at a high premium. So strong political and financial interests were brought to bear against the unjust and discrimin-

ating inequality of the tax, and so it was soon repealed and returns no longer required. During the entire period that the returns were made to the Commissioner of Internal Revenue, after the abolishment of Assessors in about 1875, I handled all the taxable returns which were made semi-annually January and July 1st, entirely alone, by working nights during the examination period, except only that they were verified by the 5th Auditor of the Treasury.

Quite frequently as I came down the winding stairway about 10:00 P. M., General Spinnor, Treasurer, "The Watch Dog of the Treasury" for several years, would be coming up the stairs from the basement where the vaults were located and always wearing the old fashioned carpet cloth slippers. He slept in a room adjoining the room of the Acting Treasurer which is, or was, on the first floor, Northeast corner. He and an official of the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, by the name of Barber were the only persons, accord-

ing to the best of my recollection, that slept nights in the Treasury in addition to the regular watchmen who patrolled each of the floors, day and night. Mr. Barber boarded at 1213 K St., at the same place as myself and at that time, there was much counterfeit money in circulation caused principally by the engravers stealing plates, and so he slept there nights to guard the plates. The Bureau of Engraving and Printing, as near as it can be recalled, occupied the entire West top attic floor, and part of the West third floor.

The entire North Attic floor was used by the Bureau of Internal Revenue for storage of old files and papers. It was a great wonder to me, how the employees, engravers and printers could work in such a place for it was so hot in the Revenue top floor room, that revenue stamps would drop off from Bonded warehouse documents and other papers when I chanced to be handling them in connection with settling claims with Assessors of different states and districts for Commissions due on goods

re-shipped in bond to be sold in another district.

There was no paid Civil Service Board at that time, examinations being held in accordance with rules and regulations promulgated by General Grant. There was no competitive examination until July 1, 1873 in the Treasury Department which included the entire Bureau of Engraving and Printing,, as well as the Internal Revenue Bureau and National Bank Redemption Agency, Comptroller of the Currency, etc. All the officers and clerks connected with the Civil Service Board during this period were detailed or drafted from other branches of the Treasury Department and all without extra pay. On account of the over crowded condition of the Treasury Building, such as the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, National Bank Redemption Agency and Internal Revenue which now have, each, a separate building, quite comparable to the entire Treasury Building. The Civil Service Board rooms were rented over Park & Tilford Groc-

ery Store, adjoining the Eobitt House Hotel on F Street for this temporary and periodically examining board. While for several years there were no paid Board of Civil Service Examiners and during the period that the examinations were held in the rooms over Park & Tilford Grocery Store, I was detailed over there for a few days during each examination from papers which were not only held there but from all the principal cities of the different states where such examinations were held. Each examination being divided into subjects, and I acted only on mathematics which counted more on the total average (40%) than any other subject and as I can recall the great majority fell down on simple addition; from the manner of setting up the example without pointing off the units, and time limit required if answered correctly. None, but experienced and expert accountants could obtain the required average, on that subject.

It may be interesting to learn that the room in which I worked on these

bank returns referred to, was situated on the third floor of the North East corner of the Treasury Building. It was the largest room in the Treasury and General Grant's First Inaugural Ball was held in that room. There were four doors opening from it into the hall and the door nearest my lesk was No. 96. I looked into this room in 1928 and I believe I am safe in stating that there were more woman clerks and stenographers running adding machines and typewriters than were on the payroll of the entire Internal Revenue Bureau, both males and females, when I left in 1877.

I looked into this room again in April this year (1935) and it was being subdivided into four rooms and the entire Internal Revenue Bureau transferred to a new department or bureau situated on Constitution Ave., south of Pennsylvania Ave., a structure covering an entire square with as many stories high and floor space apparently equal to the entire Treasury Department, and with

as many clerks and employees, both male and female.

"The Whisky Ring"

"And it came to pass" that whisky was being sold for less than the revenue tax and there was great commotion in the secret service branch of the Department. They traced the trouble direct to the Distillers and sent agents to the suspected Distilleries but upon their personal investigation everything seemed O. K. but still the trouble was increasing. In relating this part of a very historical scandal, it is important to state how the detective force got after me as being implicated in the gigantic and notorious performance.

In the beginning my first idea of a position in the Treasury was, while employed in the Juliand Bank, Russell & Juliand of Greene, N. Y., 1870, I was duly notified that the son of Mr. Russell having finished school, desired to take my position and that they regretted that my services would no longer be required after April 1, 1871. So while con-

templating about the future, I happened to see in the daily New York papers that William O. Avery of Greene had been appointed Chief Clerk of the Internal Revenue Bureau or Treasury Department. As I was always called William Avery, and because he happened to be a resident of Greene, although I had never seen or heard of him before, as well as the fact that I was compelled to look up another job, I chanced to write him a letter thinking he might give me consideration, simply because I was living in Greene, so I had the courage to send him a letter and received a reply to the effect that appointments were acted upon by recommendations of Congressmen from the district in which the applicant resided. I happened to show this letter to a Mr. Frederick Juliand of Greene, ex-member of the State Assembly and he, knowing my circumstances, at once and gladly grasped the situation. He said, "I know what you require and I will fix it up." Very shortly, he came to me and said "you get three or four of

the most prominent men in your Village (Oxford) to sign this and I will sign and send it to Congressman Mr. E. H. Prindle from this district." So I went ahead as directed and in a few days received a letter dated March 19, 1871 from Mr. Prindle, stating that he had acted as requested but "Have little faith in my power to obtain the appointment." "I have had some experience in that line of business since I have been here and I have not yet been very successful." "The applicants for positions are so numerous that only a few can be successful."

When I appeared for examination on July 3, 1871, at the Treasury Department, it was necessary to report to Avery, the Chief Clerk, through whose office I had been directed to appear. As I recall it, only a few words passed between us, on account of his claiming to be a resident of Greene and my being called by the same name and from the same place, and as surprising as it may seem, from what transpired later, common sense should lead one in my posi-

tion to become a perfect stranger and unknown to each other.

As previously stated when whisky was selling for less than the tax and the Revenue Agents and Secret Service Men unable to find the "Leak"—it was finally discovered that when Agents were sent from the Department to a certain Distillery, such Distillery was informed in advance by a secret cipher dispatch from someone inside the Department, to be prepared. Much to the astonishment of the Department, it was discovered this cipher dispatch was signed "Sylph" in the handwriting of William O. Avery. So Avery was convicted and sent to the Penitentiary, I think in St. Louis for how long, I do not remember and that was the last heard of him as I never heard what became of him afterward. But what could have been his motive? Who got the money? Who gained by the operation? These questions sent the entire detective force after others supposed to be in the deal.

General Grant's private secretary at

the time, 1875, was I think called Babcock, and as well as I can recall after so many years it was concluded but not proved that Avery was influenced through him, and he (Babcock) by prominent politicians. Collectors and Distillers and that only Consumers and those who bought the whisky really made anything. (See World Book, page 7742, vol. 18). While this investigation was in progress, and in trying to find the others supposed to be in the ring; who got any money, I was unconcerned but not surprised when I learned they were on my trail in full force. I was called before the Chief of the Secret Service Office, whose office happened to be across the hall on the same floor as my office, opposite the room I occupied. So I appeared quite unconcerned before him and he commenced firing questions:

"Is your name William Avery Stratton?"

"Did you come from Greene, N. Y.?"

"Are you related to W. O. Avery?"

"Named after him?" "It is charged

that you are related to him, appointed by him and also working against the Republican Candidate for President and loaning money to clerks at usury rates."

When I reported these facts to other Revenue Officers who were familiar with my duties working on Bank Reports, many nights solitary and alone, as well as being detailed on the Civil Service Board of Examinations; no paid board until 1883, they at once and without my knowledge started a petition of disapproval and denial of the charge according to the best of their knowledge and belief. When I mentioned the name of the party whom I thought gave all this false information, that he was a lobbyist from Wisconsin, trying to influence Congress on an appropriation for improvement of the Harbor at Superior, (there was a contest between Superior and Duluth for the terminal of the Northern Pacific Railroad), it seemed to hit the nail all right and I never heard anything more.

Nor can I remember whatever became of the lobbyist.

During this period when typewriters, adding machines and telephones were unknown and there were no schools for teaching Stenography, nor fountain pens, I think it safe to state that a greater volume of transactions were recorded, with more accuracy and speed, less time and cost, and with a less number of people than now. To illustrate and prove this fact, I submit the following statement of salaries as shown by the report of George W. Douglas, Commissioner of Internal Revenue for the year 1875, only 10 years after the Civil War, April 1865; compared now 17 years after the World War and Armistice of November 1918:

Commissioner - -	$6,000.00
1 Deputy - - -	3,500.00
1 Deputy - - -	3,000.00
7 Heads of Division, each -	2,500.00
1 Stenographer - -	2,000.00
30 Clerks—4th Class, each - -	1,800.00
45 Clerks—3rd Class, each -	1,600.00
52 Clerks—2nd Class, each -	1,400.00
18 Clerks—1st Class, each -	1,200.00
75 Lady Copyists, each -	900.00
5 Messengers, each -	840.00
3 Assistant Messengers, each	720.00
14 Laborers, each - -	720.00

After the abolishment of the tax of 1/24 of 1% per month on Deposits in Savings Banks, Trust Companies, etc., I was detailed or assigned to the task of settling claims of Assessors for Commission due on goods (whisky and tobacco) shipped in Bond from one District to another. As in the case of the Savings Bank Returns, all reports passed through the office of the Fifth Auditor of the Treasury which was on the same floor, S. W. Corner as the one in which I worked.

On account of incomplete records of

many collectors and the complexity of determining the identy of re-shipment from one district to another on which Assessors were entitled to a certain per cent of commission, it was decided to determine the amount on a percentage basis of the total. According to the best of my recollection, I made all the original figures and filled in all the blanks for all the Assessors in the United States. Such claims being signed by H. C. Rogers, Deputy Commissioner, and then referred to the Fifth Auditor of the Treasury, Jacob H. Ely, and not a single claim was ever returned for correction.

During the eight years of General Grants Administration and four years of Rutherford B. Hayes, and during the period that I was connected with the Treasury Department as herein stated, the following were acting as secretaries of the Treasury:

Under Gen. Grant, Pres.—Geo. S. Boutwell, Nat. Richardson, B. H. Bristow, and L. M. Morrell. Under R. B. Hayes, Pres.—John Sherman.

CHAPTER III

Adventure on the Columbia

Referring to my adventure in Oregon in 1877, see chapter 4. My intended destination was Walla Walla, via steamer from Portland and portage by rail around the rapids of the Columbia. On arriving at the Dallas, near the rapids, I first learned that General Howard was at war with the Nez Perces Indians, and saw the sale of horses going on and being purchased by the government for cavalry purposes at $60.00 each, for such as could meet a certain standard as to height, weight, etc. I decided on receiving this unexpected news to change my course and go on horseback via the Klickitack section on the Washington side of the Columbia, so I happened to purchase a three-year-old mare, with saddle and bridal, which had been rejected by purchasing agents, all for $18.00. So crossing the river by ferry boat at this point, I start-

ed on my way to Walla Walla on horseback. Although it was in July, while the days were hot, the nights were cold. Not having a blanket, I was obliged to travel all night, and let the horse lead the way. Toward morning, on crossing the bed of a dry creek, she gave a leap and I landed on its stone and rocky bed, but held to the rope. Being unable to mount again from the effect of this accident, I kept on afoot, and in the morning found myself at what is now Goldendale. I had been going blindfold except that I let the horse lead the way, and to my surprise about midnight, she stopped suddenly; letting out the rope, she went a few rods off the supposed trail and began feeding on the bunch grass, and in less than an hour was satisfied, and traveled on again. This, was the first that I discovered the great abundance and value of bunch grass for grazing purposes. At this point was a mill for grinding wheat, and perhaps a half dozen habitations, enough to call it a settlement, and I saw the first person I had seen since leaving the

Dalles. After resting and recovering from my fall, and having something to eat, I started on again to my objective, Walla Walla.

Passed a deserted stockade, and thinking nothing about Indians, until about midafternoon, I met one sitting under a tree; and by the usual sign language, he gave me to understand that he wanted some tobacco. Never having any tobacco, I "nodded" to that effect, and he replied by a savage "grunt." Then and there, I was frightened. I dismounted and pretended to lead the horse, so that if he let "strip," I could dodge behind the horse. Going on a little farther, in the distance I saw two more Indians coming toward me. One, a warrior, was in full blossom, with paint, feathers, bow and quiver full of arrows. They separated, the warrior coming direct, like the spokes of a wagon pointing to the hub or center. They met me together; the warrior dismounting like a circus performer. He looked at me, and I looked at him. Experience had taught me never to ap-

pear to be frightened. Then immediately by signs and gestures, and marks on the level, smooth, bunch grass soil, he gave me to understand that he was looking for a bunch of wild horses and had I seen any. I replied in the same language that I had seen them, pointing in a certain direction; and showing all my fingers to show there were many. Then and there I decided to retrace my steps. Returning to Goldendale, I left my horse; proceeded to the Dalles, then to Portland, and gave up this adventure and retreated back to California. So that is that, and here I am.

I learned later that Chief Joseph had given orders to kill every white person that was in uniform.

* * * *

Referring to Walla Walla, Lewis and Clark, in their exploration and expedition of 1805-1806, mention this region as "waste land" and the Williamette valley after describing its area, state, "This region is the only section west of the Rocky Mountains susceptive of cul-

tivation, and would sustain a population of about 50,000 souls." I think I am safe in stating that this region around Walla Walla, produces the greatest average yield per acre in production of wheat in any part of the world, and the city of Portland at the mouth of the Williametta has a population of over 300,000.

CHAPTER IV

Adventure on the Yellowstone

I left Mississippi the second time, July 1, 1881, for a venture to Montana, and went by steamer to St. Louis. On arriving there, July 4th, I received the first news of the assassination of President Garfield whose two sons, Harry and Jim, used to come to my room at 1216 K St., N. W., Washington, in the fall, to eat chestnuts and apples, and to drink new cider, sent every year by my father. They then lived at the corner of 13th and I Streets, N. W., only a block away. From St. Louis, I went by rail to Bismarch, thence via the Northern Pacific on the first passenger train to arrive at Glendive on the Yellowstone, the first station on that river after the completion of that division.

From there the railroad, following the river, was under construction, so I followed the trail going to Miles City, crossing the valleys of O'Fallon Creek,

Powder River, and other smaller streams which are dry in the summer. Then on up to the junction of the Tongue River and Yellowstone, part of the way on foot and part by wagon, crossing the Powder and other rivers, taking the chance of fording the streams with half-bred wild horses; the water sometimes covering the bottom floor of the wagon. Here and there along this journey, lay the carcasses of thousands of buffalo, recently killed simply for their hide; on account of the arid and dry climate, no odor was perceivable. So here and then, I saw and beheld the last and almost final extermination of the American Bison in the United States, south of the Yellowstone river and the Canadian boundary line.

I should further remark about the phenomenon of seeing the perpetual and everlasting fires from blazing coal seams, stretching along the northern banks of the Yellowstone for miles and miles. These at night made a most wonderful and indescribable sight. No one knew how long they had been go-

ing, or if they would ever stop. To see the burning "bunch" grass on the vast plains of Oregon, bordering the mighty Columbia river, from the high bluffs on the Washington or northern side, which at night was a most wonderful sight, was quite imcomparable to this.

I was compelled to retreat from this venture of great opportunities, by reason of thirst and the effects of drinking too much alkali water in a desert country, which disabled me for several months.

I might further and truthfully remark that I have participated and experienced with empire builders with their heavy ox and horse emigrant trains, with canvass tops and rattling, jingling chains, some from the East, some from the West, the final and closing scenes with the Sioux Indian tribe representing the highest type of North American Indians in physical courage, intelligence, endurance and determination; tall and straight of stature and of commanding appearance and character. The most powerful warriors of any

tribe, not excepting the Nez Perces of the North West, who were fighting General Howard in Oregon, Washington and Idaho, when I left there in 1877. (See page 52, chapter 3).

This tribe was commanded by Sitting Bull; and on June 25, 1876, they almost completely annihilated and massacred General Custer and his entire cavalry on the banks of the Little Big Horn, a tributary of the Yellowstone. At this time, 1881, they were completely conquered and placed on their reservations.

So then and there, I might say that I saw the last muster of the advance guard of civilization and progress, and the opening up of a New Empire, and the last of Indian warfare of any consequence, in the United States.

[The End]